FOLKSONGS OF THE

BLACK COUNTRY

EDITED BY: M. Raven and J. Raven, F.R.G.S.

SUNG BY: The Black Country Three.

FOREWORD BY: J.M. Fletcher M.A., D. Phil. (Oxon)

FOREWORD.

In my work as Tutor Organiser in South Staffordshire for the Workers' Educational Association I have repeatedly come into contact with men and women who preserve many of the traditions of the Black Country. From them I have collected rhymes, songs and stories which illustrate the harsh history of the transition of this area from an agricultural to an industrial community. Other collectors, such as Mr. Tom Langley whose broadcasts have done much to encourage interest in the traditions of the Black Country, have placed their own material at my disposal and have, therefore, helped me to build up a more representative collection. These oral traditions can be readily supplemented by local material preserved in the broadsheets and other transitory publications of the last century.

The material so collected is almost unknown to people outside the Black Country and often to those living in the area itself. It is my ambition to see this material made easily available for the entertainment and education of all who wish to understand something of the social life of the people of the Black Country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is also important that this tradition should be a living one, and in this work the co-operation of the Black Country Three in setting to music and performing these poems and ballads is invaluable. We hope that by the publication and performance of these local songs we may encourage a wider understanding of Black Country traditions and also induce others to attempt to portray events of our own times in a similar manner.

The work of collecting these traditional poems can only be done with the co-operation of the people of the Black Country. We therefore appeal to all readers who know of any local rhymes however fragmentary, to contact me at 98, Bescot Road, Walsall, Staffs, (Tel: Walsall 27989). All contributions will be gratefully acknowledged. Suggestions and enquiries concerning this series may also be made to this address or to the Wolverhampton Folk Song Club, The Queen's Hotel, Wolverhampton.

Dr. John M. Fletcher.

INTRODUCTION.

The songs chosen for this first book of Black Country Songs are those which are currently being sung by the Black Country Three in their Sunday night session at the Queen's Hotel, Wolverhampton.

Since tunes for the songs were not available well known folk tunes have been used or a tune has been composed. We hope that these tunes will be in keeping with the general style of the songs. While tunes and arrangements are suggested they are not meant to be hard and fast. Some may wish to sing the songs in their original form or with a different arrangement. It is for this reason that we have included one song, Jolly Joe the Collier's Son, without suggesting an arrangement.

Whether the songs are good examples of folk song or not will depend on how each individual judges the merits of a folk song. One point is certain - they are a part of the Black Country heritage and as such they deserve a greater place in our local folk music than they aspire to at present.

Much work has been done by individuals and organisations on the collection of folk songs but little has been published of Black Country folk song. Dr. Fletcher, Charles Parker and others have accomplished valuable work in collecting and making known the collected material and we hope that this brief selection of songs will show that others have been fired by their enthusiasm.

We would like to acknowledge the help we have received, in obtaining this material, from Dr. John Fletcher of Walsall, Mr. Derek Cherrington of Great Wyrley, Miss Dawtry of Tettenhall and the Birmingham Reference Library. Our thanks also to club members, who have made this venture financially possible

J. Raven
M. Raven

January 1965.

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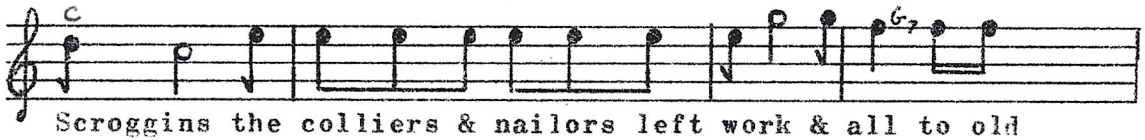
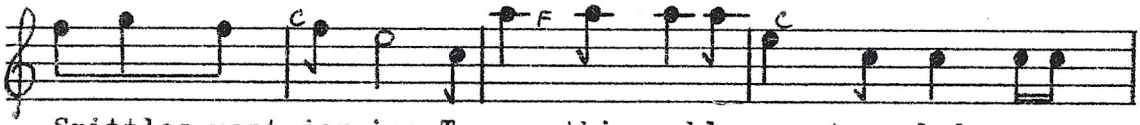
Wednesbury - (Wedgebury) Cocking

Notes - From an early C19th Broadsheet - the original sheet can be seen in Birmingham Reference Library. The chorus, line endings of 'me lads' and the tune were added by M. Raven. The version sung by the Black Country Three omits verses 3,4,5,6,7,8, & 12. The six main story verses and the chorus will then make a more manageable unit.
All letter omissions appear as in the original.
A revised version of this song is in existence, enquiries regarding this version should be sent to Dr. Fletcher.
For further information regarding this song see J.F. Ede, History of Wednesbury.

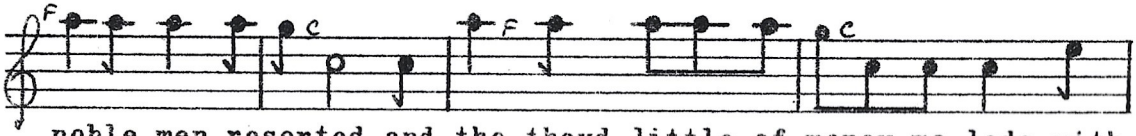
At Wednesbury there was a cocking a match between Newton and



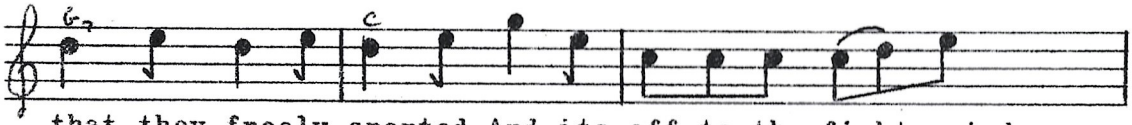
Scroggins the colliers & nailors left work & all to old



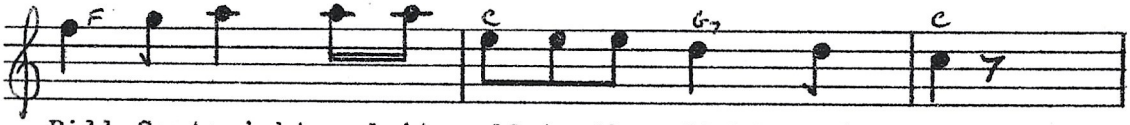
Spittles went jogging To see this noble sport me lads many



noble men resorted and tho theyd little of money me lads with



that they freely sported And its off to the fight cried



Bill Cartwright and its off to the fight cried he

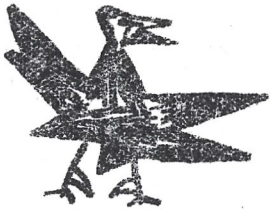
1. At Wednesbury there was a cocking,
A match between Newton and Scroggins.
The Colliers and Nailors left work,
And all to old Spittles went jogging.
To see this noble sport, me lads,
Many noble men resorted.
And though they'd little of money, me lads,
With that they freely sported.

Chorus - Oh it's off to the fight cried Bill Cartwright,
And it's off to the fight cried he.
Oh it's off to the fight cried Bill Cartwright,
And it's off to the fight cried he.

2. There was Jeffory & Oldborn from Hampton*,
And Dusty from Bilston was there,
Plummery he came from Darlaston,
And he was as rude as a bear.
Old Will he came from Walsall, me lads,
And Smacker from West Brom. come.
Blind Robin he came from Rowley, me lads,
And staggering he went whum (home).

3. Ralph Moody came hobbling along,
As though he some cripple was mocking.
To join in the black-guard throng,
That met at Wednesbury Cocking.
He borrowed a trifle of Doll* me lads,
To back old Taverner's grey,
He laid fourpence half-penny to fourpence, me lads,
Then lost and went broken away.

* Wolverhampton * Possibly a woman friend.



4. But soon he returned to the pit,
For he'd borrowed a trifle of money,
And ventured another large bet,
Along with blobber mouth Coney.
When Coney demanded his money, me lads,
Which is common on all such occasions,
He cry'd blast thee if thee don't hold thy peace, me lads
I'll pay thee as Paul paid the Ephesians.

5. Scroggins' breeches were made of nankeen,
And wore very thin in the groin,
In stooping to handle his cock,
His ho--ks burst out behind,
Besides his shirt tail was besh-t, me lads,
Which caused among them much laughter,
Scroggins turned himself round in a pet, me lads,
And cried b--g-r ye what's the matter.

6. The morning's sport being over,
Old Spittle a dinner proclaimed,
Each man he should dine for a groat.
If he grumbled he ought to be d--nd,
For there was plenty of beef, me lads,
But Spittle he swore by his troth,
That never a man should dine, me lads,
Till he'd eaten his noggin of broth.

7. The beef it was old and tough,
Of a bull that was baited to death,
Barney Hide got a lump in his throat,
That had liked to have stopp'd his breath.
The company all fell into confusion, me lads,
At seeing poor Barney Hide choaked,
They took him into the kitchen, me lads,
And held his head over the smoke.

8. They held him so close to the fire,
He frizzled just like a beef steak,
Then threw him down on the floor,
Which had like to have broken his neck.
One gave him a kick in the stomach, me lads,
Another a kick on the brow,
His wife said throw him into the stable, me lads,
And he will be better just now.

9. Then they all returned to the pit,
And the fighting went forward again,
Six battles were fought on each side,
And the next to decide the main*.
For they were two famous cocks, me lads,
As ever this country bred,
Scroggins a duck-winged black, me lads,
And Newton's a shift-wing red.

10. The conflict was hard on both sides,
Till brassy winged black's was choaked,
The colliers were nationally vexed,
And the nailors were sorely provoked,
Peter Stephens he swore a great oath, me lads,
That Scroggins had play'd his cock foul,
Scroggins he gave him a kick, me lads,
And cried God d--n ye soul.

11. The company then fell in a discord,
A bold fight did ensue,
Kick b----r and bite was the word,
Till the Walsall men were subdued,
Ralph Moody* bit off a man's nose, me lads,
And wish'd that he could have him slain,
So they trampled both cocks to death, me lads,
And they made a draw of the main.

* Match.

* Ralph Moody. Moses Whitehouse who kept the recently demolished Mine Borer's Arms in Darlaston was known as Ruff Moey because of his fighting reputation. This name was changed to Ralph Moody by later writers.

12. The cock pit was near to the church,
An ornament unto the town,
On one side was an old coal pit,
The other well gors'd around.
Peter Hadley peep'd through the gorse, me lads,
In order to see them fight,
Spittle jobb'd his eye out with a fork, me lads,
And said, b--t thee it serves thee right.

13. Some people may think this is strange,
Who Wednesbury never knew,
But those who have ever been there,
Won't have the least doubt but it's true,
For they are savage by nature, me lads,
And guilty of deeds most shocking,
Jack Baker he wacked his own father, me lads,
And so ended Wednesbury cocking.

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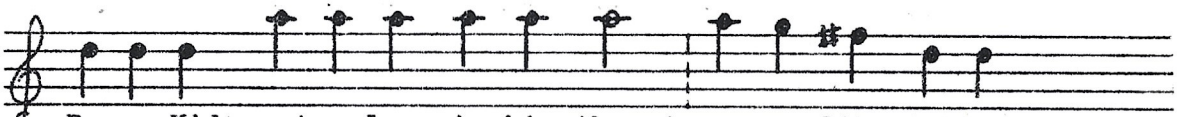
Wedgebury Cocking

Notes - As sung by Miss Dawtry of Tettenhall. This collected version (J.R.1964) was passed down from Miss Dawtry's grandfather. He employed young women in his Blacksmiths shop near the Ring O'Bells in Churchfields, West Bromwich, and he learned the song from them. Miss Dawtry's version is of six verses (four lines per verse) each of which occurs in the broad sheet version. We have omitted them since the important points in this version are the tune and the chorus.



Bunny Hide got a lump in his throat as was like to have

Stopped his breath The beef it was old and tough off a bull

That was baited to death. Ril-fol-did-dy Rol-did-dy Fol-did-dy

Rol-did-dy Fol-did-dy Rol-did-dy eh yah

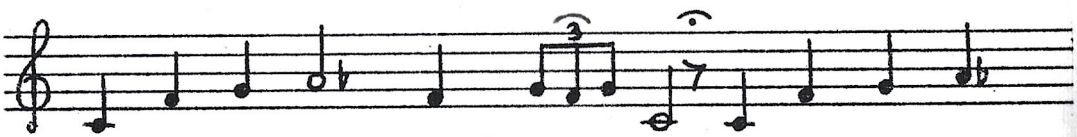
1. Bunny Hide got a lump in his throat
As was like to have stopped his breath
The beef it was old and tough
Off a bull that was baited to jeth.

Chorus: Ril-fol-did-dy Rol did-dy Fol did-dy Rol did-dy
Fol-did-dy Rol-did-dy eh-yah.

Come all yew blaids what's mariyed

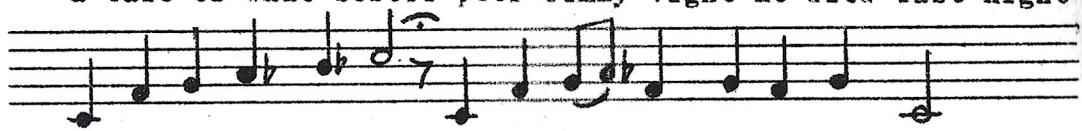
Notes - As sung by Miss Dawtry of Tettenhall. This collected fragment (J.R.1964) has also been passed down through Miss Dawtry's family.

The tune is a very beautiful one and it is possible that the originator of the song borrowed the tune from elsewhere. The pauses marked, Miss Dawtry says, were often quite long and the singer would use them for dramatic effect and to see how his audience was reacting to the song.

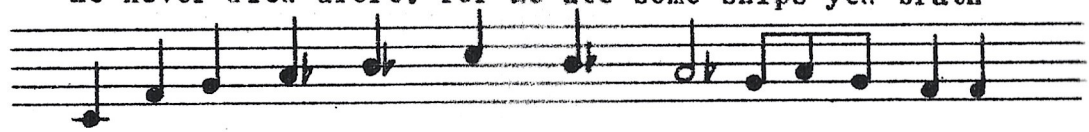


Come all yew blaids what's mar-ri-yed and yew shun hear

a tale of what befell poor Jimmy Vight he died last night



he never died afore. For he ate some ships yed brath



and he did fall stiff stark stone jed under the table

Och! Ri-too-ler-oo-ler-oo Ri-too-ler-oo

Come all yew blaids what's mariyed (pause)
And yew shun hear a tale
Of what befell poor Jimmy Vight
He died last night, he'd never died afore (pause
For he did ate some ships yed brath*
And he did fall stiff, stark, stone jed
Under the table, Och!

Chorus: Ri-toller-oo-ler-oo. Ri-to-ler-oo.

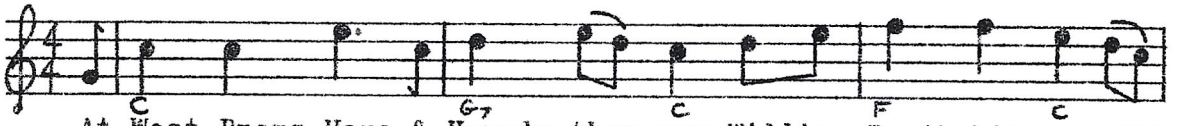
* Sheeps head broth.

Twice tried, twice hung, twice buried.

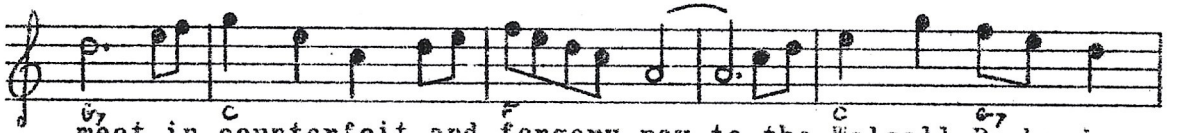
Notes - The material for this song, written by J. Raven, was obtained from Mr. Derek Cherrington of Great Wyrley, Cannock.
Booth, an infamous forger, lived on Squire Gough's Farm at Perry Hall (now known as Booth's farm). A tunnel was supposed to lead from the farm to the Hare & Hounds at West Bromwich where he transacted his business.
Suspected of two murders and tried for a third he was finally caught while attempting to burn the evidence of forgery and was tried and sentenced to death at Stafford Assize in 1812. The executioner bungled and Booth had to be revived and was hung again two hours later. After burial the Staffordshire/Warwickshire boundary was altered and Booth's remains dug up and re-buried in the right county. Twice tried, twice hung, twice buried was the reputation he earned for himself.

The above story came to light in 1956 when Mr. Cherrington discovered a hoard of coins in the garden of his Birmingham, Perry Barr, home and took them to Birmingham Musuem where they were pronounced very clever forgeries. All but one of these coins is now on display in Birmingham Museum. The remaining coin is in Mr. Cherrington's possession.

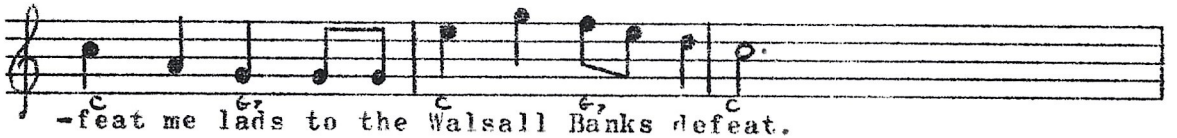
Sing the verses to the tune of The Greenland Whale Fishery.
Sing the chorus to the tune of MacPherson's Lament.



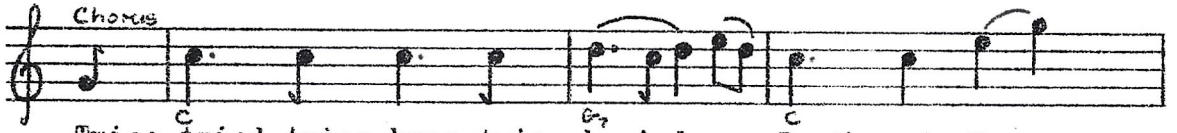
At West Broms Hare & Hounds they say William Booth his men did



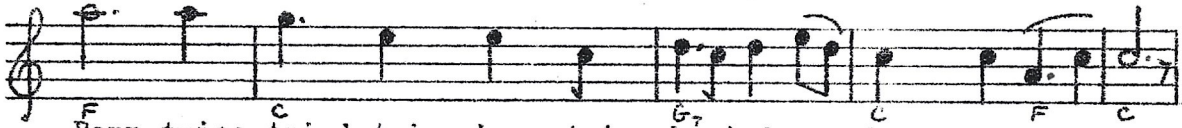
meet in counterfeit and forgery pay to the Walsall Banks de-



-feat me lads to the Walsall Banks defeat.



Twice tried twice hung twice buried was Booth of Perry



Barr twice tried twice hung twice buried was Booth of PerryBarr

1. At West Brom's Hare & Hounds they say,
William Booth his men did meet,
In counterfeit and forgery pay,
To the Walsall bank's defeat, me lads,
To the Walsall bank's defeat.

Chorus: Twice tried, twice hung, twice buried, Repeat Chorus
Was Booth of Perry Barr.

2. His brother's life and a pedlar's too
Some swore he took away,
Then tried he was for a murder new,
But the evidence held no sway, me lads,
But the evidence held no sway.

3. Dragoons full seven and specials ten,
Rode to the Hare & Hounds,
Where Booth with forgeries was ta'en,
And carried from the grounds, me lads,
And carried from the grounds.

4. At Stafford court he was arraigned
And there condemned on high,
The noose around his neck was ranged,
But Booth refused to die, me lads,
But Booth refused to die.

5. Revived and hung just two hours gone
Booth to his grave was ta'en.
Oh! There to lie but for a while,
Till the boundary line was changed, me lads,
Till the boundary line was changed.

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Notes - This classic poem from Dr. Fletcher's collection needs no introduction.

Our Eynuch bay quite jed,
Nor never wull be,
O'd Eynuch bay fergot,
Nor niver con be.
Tek a sank around Blackheath,
Or down the tump an in't o'd 'Ills
Stond annunst the cross fer 'arf-an-hour
Just t'watch the Folken all goo by.
Yoh'll see 'im theer as big as life,
O'd Eynuch, our Eynuch.

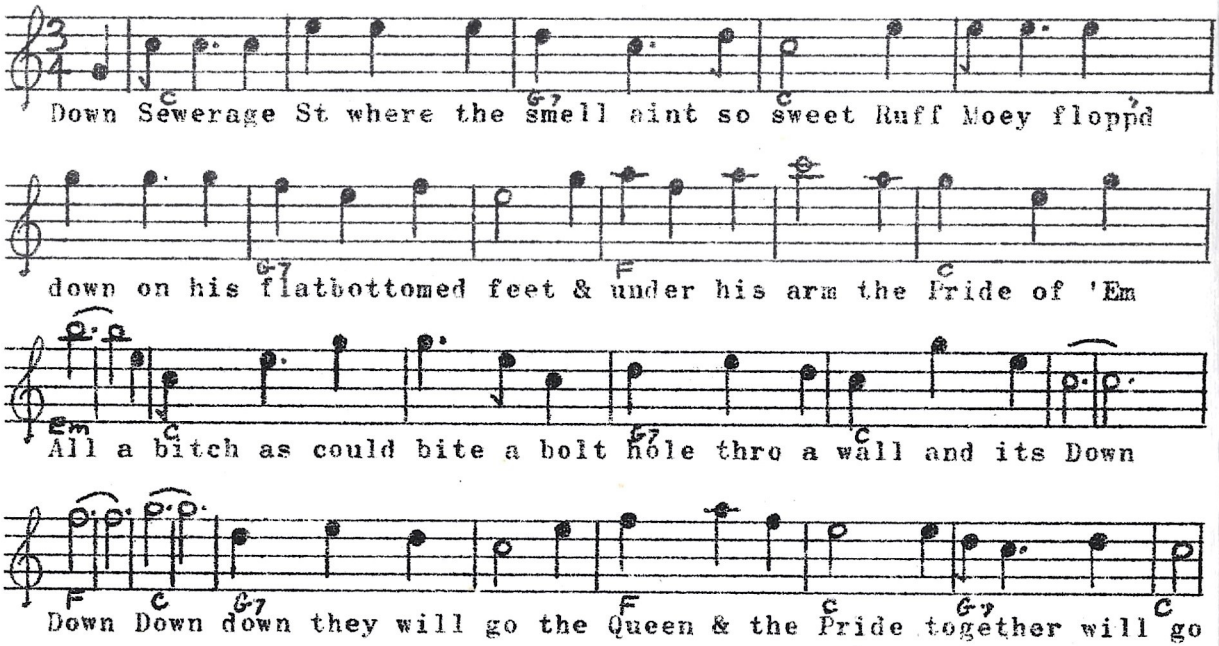
Our Eynuch left 'is mark,
Yoh can't mistaike et, see?
Is ommer prints bin 'ere
An always wull be.
Just look in all the nailshops,
If some bey the'er, that meks no odds.
See that ooman scruven up the gledes?
That's 'er wot fashions all the nails,
Yoh'll bet 'er mon bay fer away,
O'd Eynuch, our Eynuch.

Our Eynuch med big chains
(Is ooman med the small).
See them the'er big anchors?
Eynuch med um all.
In Cradley Heath yoh'll find 'im
Around any chain shop in the day,
Or if it's night look in the pubs
(Yoh'll seem um nustled 'gainst the cherch)
O'd Eynuch, our Eynuch.

No Eynuch bay quite jed,
Nor he never wull be.
O'd Eynuch bay fergot,
Nor never con be,
'Ast ever sid a Jews 'Arp?
'E med um all be Rowley Cherch.
Stand atop Hawes Hill an look a'down
See all them lights annunst the cut,
He used to puddle iron theer
O'd Eynuch, our Eynuch.

The Dog Fight (Darlaston)

Notes - From Dr. Fletcher's collection of Black Country songs. The chorus and the tune were added by M. Raven. The version sung by the Black Country Three omits verses 4,7 & 10. The first two lines in verse 5 are joined with the last two lines of verse 6 to make one verse. As in the Wednesbury Cocking, the omissions and the addition of a chorus are effected to make a more manageable unit.



1. Down Sewerage Street where the smell ain't so sweet,
Ruff Moey* flopped down on his flat bottomed feet,
And under his arm the Pride of 'Em All,
The bitch as could bite a bolt hole through a wall.

Chorus: And it's down, down, down, down they will go,
The Queen and the Pride together will go.

2. And back of the Bull Stake by Darlaston Green,
Ben Bates brought his bitch the Willenhall Queen,
The Queen had a mouth like a shark with the yaws,
And God help the dog as got stuck in her jaws.

3. At scratch on the sewer a hundred were stood,
They'd all backed their fancy and thirsted for blood.
They backed with the bookie each bitch at odds on,
No matter who lost he knew he had won.

4. The lickers* licked hard and they licked very well,
They d'aint miss a hair on them dogs-you can tell,
A tot or two more and instead of a dog
They'd have licked all the spikes on a spavined hedgehog.

5. Old Reuben made referee of the match,
The Pride and the Queen was brought up to scratch,
The bell for the start the timekeeper smote,
And both of them dogs went for each others throat.

6. The Queen missed the Pride and Ben Bates shed a tear,
The Pride missed the Queen with a snap you could hear.
Five minutes went by without sign of a bite,
It was more like a dance than a fighting dog fight.

* See notes on Moses Whitehouse - Page 1

* The lickers were special officials who checked the dogs for concealed spikes, poison, etc.

7. Ruff cussed for a coward the Pride of 'Em All,
The Pride seemed too drunk to be bothered at all.
And as for the Queen, Ben Bates hung his head,
And cried to the crowd to say prayers for the dead.

8. Then into the pit jumped Ruff Mo with a roar,
He fell on his face and lay flat on the floor,
And then he found out why them dogs wouldn't bite,
Sewer gas in the pit they was too drugged to fight.

9. Ruff Mo had a lungful and d'aint feel to well,
He bit at them dogs-they bit back, you can tell,
The Queen had a bite that took half of his ear,
The Pride had a mouthful of ham off his rear.

10. No matter how Ruff urged them dogs on to fight,
They both was too drugged and to b-----d to bite.
He kicked at the Queen which collapsed on the floor,
She kicked at Ruff where his backside was sore.

11. Them dogs at each other could not point a paw,
And Reuben declared that the match was a draw.
The bookmaker blarted-he had to pay back,
The money he thought was his own in the sack.

12. That fight was the last by Ben Bates and his Queen,
Broken hearted they died in the pub by the Green,
Ruff Moey has never been able to s-it,
The same as afore he got bit in the pit.

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Jolly Joe the Collier's Son.

Notes - From an early C19th Broadsheet - the original sheet can be seen in Birmingham Reference Library.
The song is printed in it's original form without chorus or suggested verse omissions.
Selection of a tune will depend on the singer's interpretation of the song. It could be considered tragic or light-hearted. In the former case the tune of Mary Hamilton (also called the Four Marys) will fit the song if each verse is divided into two. In the latter case the tune of North Country is a useful one.

1. I am Jolly Joe the collier's son,
Near Oldbury town I dwell,
I courted lasses many one,
And Lov'd them all right well:
I courted Nancy & young Kate,
And buxom young Nelly too,
But Rachael is the girl I adore,
And that you soon shall know.

2. Come all you colliers in this row,
Who delight in a bonny lass,
Who loves to drink good ale that's brown,
And sparkles in the glass:
My parents they do frown on me,
And say I am to blame,
For keeping Rachael's company,
Who liveth in Mash-Lane.

3. When I rose up one morning,
At the dawning of the day,
I like to hear the small birds sing,
See the lambs to skip and play:
I took a walk to Oldbury town,
Round by the Bilston hill,
And there I spy'd my own true love,
With Jack of Armlow mill.

4. I hid myself behind a shade,
A distance from whence they came,
He gave her kisses one, two, three,
Not knowing I was there:
I boldly stepped up to them,
Saying rogue what hast thou done?
I am Jolly Joe the collier's son,
So you must either fight or run.

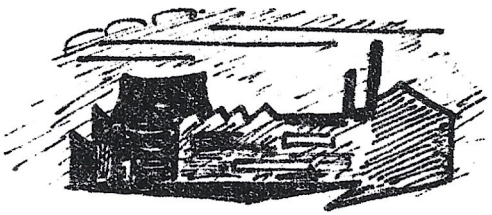
5. Hold your hand, dear Joe, she said,
And no more of that let's have,
I will be thy servant, slave and wife,
Till we both go to one grave:
Then to the church young Rachael went,
Right sore against her will,
So maidens all pity my downfall,
By Jack of Armlow mill.

Brummagem, I Can't Find.

Notes - From an early C19th Broadsheet - the original can be seen in Birmingham Reference Library.

The addition of the chorus from the song North Country may seem irrelevant at first sight but in view of the rapid industrialisation of Birmingham at this time it struck us as fair irony to use the chorus.
Comparison with the original broadsheet will reveal changes in the word arrangement in certain lines. These changes are made to facilitate the fitting of lyrics to melody. If difficulty still arises, experiment by placing the accent on different words in the line and you should hit on a solution.
With the present rapid changes taking place in Birmingham, substitution of buildings and streets (Bull Ring) which are disappearing today would make the song quite a good modern commentary on the changing face of the city.
The version sung by the Black Country Three omits verse 5 and uses the chorus of North Country.

Sing to the tune of North Country.



1. Full twenty years and more are past,
Since I left Brummagem,
But I set out for home at last,
To good old Brummagem,
But every place is altered so,
There's hardly a place I know,
Which fills my heart with grief and woe,
For I can't find Brummagem.

Chorus: And it's home boys, home,
Home I'd like to be,
Home for a while in my own counteree,
Where the oak and the ash and the bonny Rowan tree,
Are all a growing greener in the Black Counteree.

2. As I was walking down our street,
As used to be in Brum,
I knowed nobody I did meet,
They've changed their face in Brum.,
Poor old Spiceal's Street half gone,
And Old Church stands alone,
And poor old I stands here to groan,
For I can't find Brummagem.

3. But amongst the changes we have got,
In good old Brummagem,
They've made a market on the moat,
To sell the pigs in Brum.,
But that has brought us more i ll luck,
For they've filled up Pudding Brook,
Where in the brook jack—banils took*,
Near good old Brummagem.

* Jack—banils - rather an unusual way of naming this fish, since they are referred to as jack-bannocks in most of the Black Country.

4. But what's more melancholy still,
For poor old Brummagem,
They've taken away all Newhall-hill,
From poor old Brummagem,
At Easter time girls fair and brown,
Came rolly-polly down,
And showed their legs to half the town,
Oh! the good old sights in Brum.

5. Down Peck Lane I walked along,
To find out Brummagem,
There was the dungil* down and gone
What no rogues in Brum.,
They've ta'en it to a street called Moor,
A sign that rogues ain't fewer,
But rogues won't like it there I'm sure,
While Peck Lane's in Brummagem.

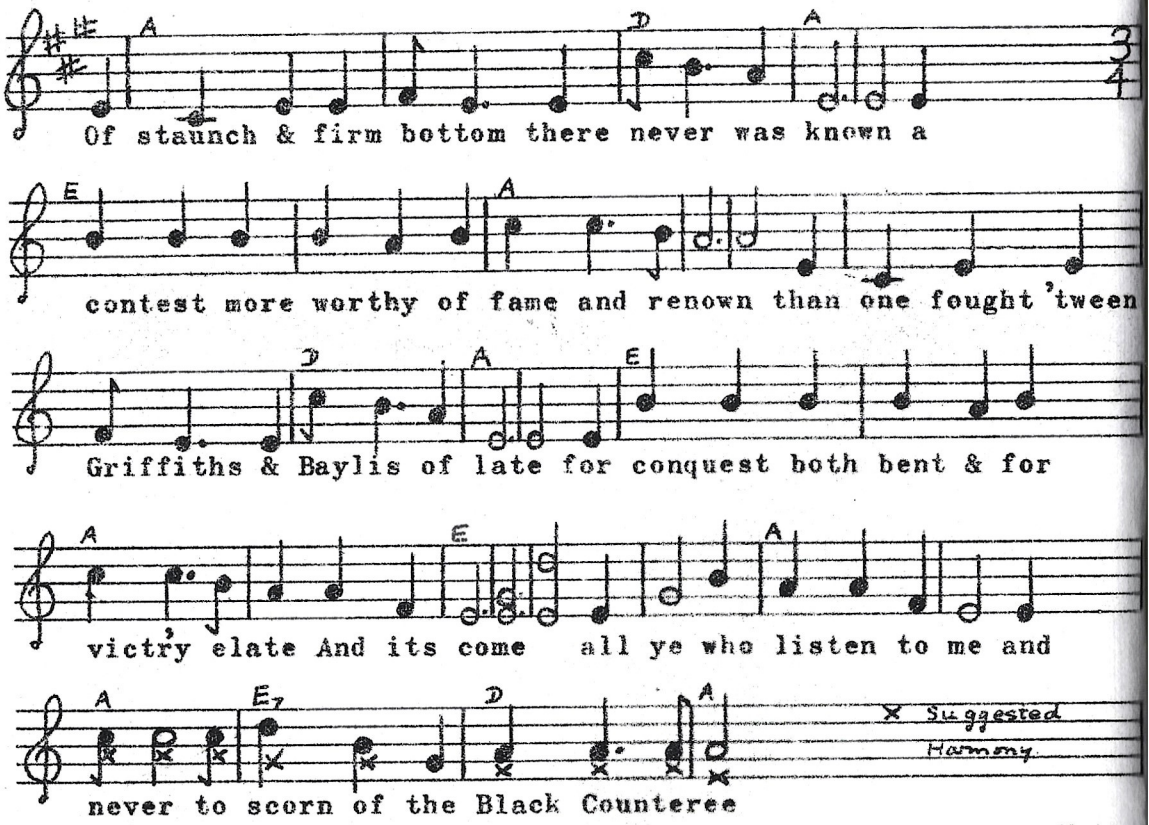
6. I remember one John Growse,
Who buckles made in Brum.,
He built himself a country house,
To be out of the smoke of Brum.,
But though John's country house stands still,
The town has walked up hill,
Now he lives besides a smoky mill,
In the middle of Brummagem.

7. Among the changes that abound,
In good old Brummagem,
May trade and happiness be found,
In good old Brummagem,
And tho' no Newhall-hill we've got,
Nor Pudding Brook nor Moat,
May we always have enough,
To boil the pot in Brum.

* dungil - prison.

Song, on a Desperate Boxing Match: fought between
Henry Griffiths of Birmingham
and
Benjamin Baylis of Wednesbury
near the town of Sutton
On Tuesday, October the 15th, 1816.

Notes - from a C19th Broadsheet - the original sheet can be seem in Birmingham Reference Library.



1. For staunch and firm bottom there never was known
A contest more worthy of fame and renown,
Than one fought 'tween Griffiths and Baylis, of late,
On conquest both bent and for vict'ry elate.

Chorus: And it's come, all ye who listen to me
And never to scorn of the Black Country.

2. October the fifteenth at one in the day,
Began this most bloody and terrible fray,
Determin'd they both were on ent'ring the field,
To forfeit their lives before ever they'd yield.

3. Two hundred and thirteen hard rounds were display'd,
Not one nor the other e'er once seemed afraid;
For more than four hours did the contest prevail,
And vict'ry, o'er both, still held level her scale.

4. No shuffling nor tricks, nor a moment's delay,
Of cowardice once gave the smallest display;
For half minute rests were all the rests giv'n,
To such severe fighting the contest was driv'n,

5. The seconds and umpires unable to say,
On which side the contest the victory lay,
Declar'd a drawn battle, as th'only sure road,
To stop the two heroes from shedding more blood.

6. May Birmingham and Wednesb'ry henceforth agree,
And friends their inhabitants evermore be;
When they meet, be they social and pleasant inclin'd,
And give their old grievances all to the wind.

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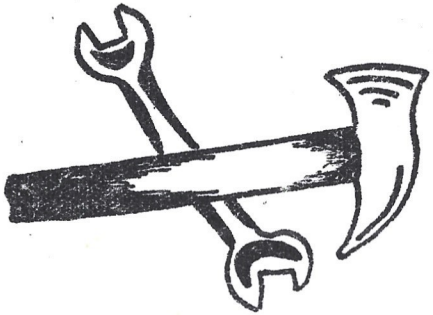

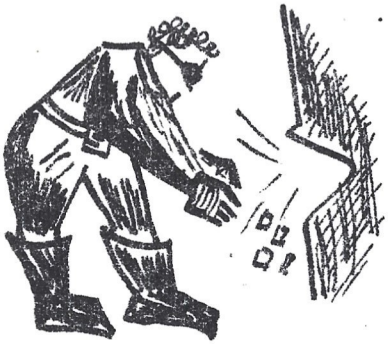

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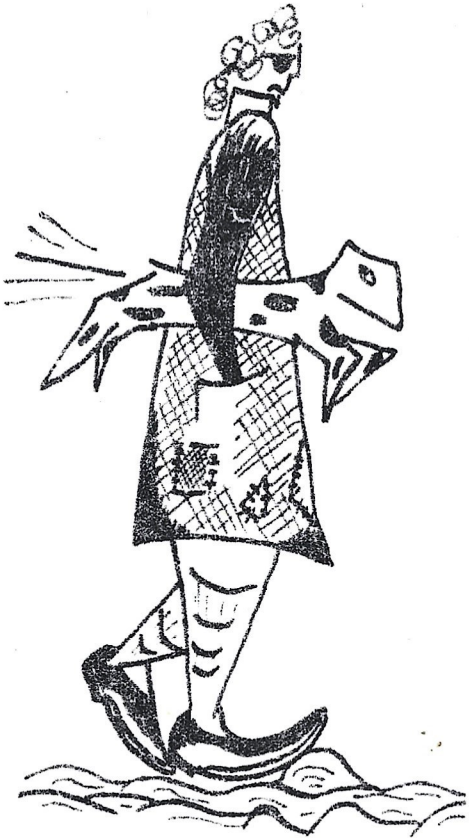

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